

A Study of a Charge That the Military Interferes With Civilian Management

By HANSON W. BALDWIN

Senator Henry M. Jackson, Democrat of Washington, put his finger on a problem that has been worrying the aircraft industry in a speech in the Senate yesterday afternoon.

Senator Jackson, alarmed at the Soviet Union's technological and industrial progress, declared that the Russians were mass-producing new aircraft faster than the United States. Their "lead time"—the time required from initial design work to quantity production—of jet long-range bombers is apparently two years less than our own, he declared.

The aircraft industry believes it knows some of the reasons for the production delays. Encroachment by the Government—particularly by military officers—upon management responsibilities, is, in part, responsible, some authorities contend.

"Colonels have run—in the fullest sense of the word—the biggest bomber plant in the country," one executive said. "And young captains have dictated to the oldest engineers in this complex business the exact procedure for a minor part development."

This trend is not new. But it has become more pronounced recently.

A number of proposals and directives sponsored by the Air Force have drawn the fire of the industry, specifically of the Aircraft Industries Association. The association has told the Air Force that some of these proposals limit management's authority and control over operations.

Regulations of this kind, the association has stated, weaken the relationship between industry and Government that is essential to efficient production. If the present trend continues, some authorities believe, the United States aircraft industry could become, in effect, similar to the socialized, Government-owned industry of France, which never has been able to produce aircraft in large numbers.

The encroachments of military authority are not limited to any one phase of aircraft production. The most recent evidences of the steady extension of Government—and particularly Air Force power—are in the engineering and design and development phase. Controls over subcontracting, purchasing of machine tools, production schedules, and so on, either already exist in multiple forms, or have been proposed. Now military officers, many of them without the necessary experience, are moving squarely into control of engineering and development planning.

In part this extension of military power into what should be essentially a civilian-managed specialist field is a natural by-product of our government's policy. The government has steadily tended to circumscribe the management authority of big business.

All sorts of returns and re-

ports now required by law take the time of management, add to the red tape of a Government contract and limit management authority.

But the major factors influencing the trend toward steady extension of military power in the aircraft industry are:

¶The industry is primarily dependent on the military for its present prosperity. Military contracts represent by far the larger share of the airframe and engine manufacturers' backlogs. The Air Force is the largest buyer and the most active and aggressive of the services in its attempts to assert authority over management.

¶Fifteen years of wars and emergencies and tremendous military budgets, with air power now getting the lion's share of the defense dollar, have turned the aircraft industry essentially into a military industry and have bestowed immense power on the military.

¶Cost-plus contracts, which require, by law, careful monitored cost accounting and Government supervision, have led to extension of Government control.

¶The Government owns many aircraft factories—or parts of factories—built with Government funds during World War II and now operated under contract by private concerns. It also owns some machine tools used in private plants.

¶Much engineering and development work now is financed by Government research contracts.

Thus, the Government's investment of the taxpayer's dollars in the nation's aircraft industries has grown, and there has naturally followed a greater degree of Government control. Congress, anxious to see this money wisely spent or safeguarded, is responsible for some of this Government supervision, and the services have been responsible for the rest.

But the thin line dividing proper Government supervision from Government interference and inefficient management has been overstepped, in the opinion of many in the industry.

"* * * the military man," one expert has said, "is gradually taking over the trained and experienced civilian expert's responsibilities."

And the power that has been bestowed on him or that he has acquired too often has led to a further ambitious extension of his power—a human "disease" but one that "always seems to be a little more virulent in the case of the Government representative."

Recently a representative of a large concern told the Air Force that the best way to speed up developmental progress was "to leave us alone." He certainly was not alone in his opinion. The industry, if a speed-up in design and development is desired this advice should be heeded in Washington.